

Athenian News:

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Dunton's Oracle.

From Saturday April the 15th, to Tuesday April the 18th, 1710.

*A Trial of Skill, or the Duelling-Post,
being an honourable Challenge to the in-
genious of either Sex, to write either
pro or con on all disputable Things.*

I shall here present the Reader with a *Trial of Skill*, or the *Duelling-Post*, being an honourable *Challenge* to the *ingenious of either Sex, to write either pro or con upon all disputable Things*; and (Reader) if all this Variety don't please ye, I must e'en despair of doing it. I shall give an Account of the Challenges I receive Weekly, and shall answer all the Challenges that are sent me by either Sex; for the Design of this *Duelling-Post* is a general *Challenge upon all disputable Things*; and if every Gentleman and Lady will put their Names to the Challenges they send, they shall never miss of an Answer; or if I refuse it, (according to the Practice of our modern Duellists) let 'em post me up for a Coward. The first *Challenge* shall be introduc'd with the Letters which formerly pass'd between Dr. M—— (then living in Cambridge) and my self, as they set my *Duelling-Post* in a clear Light, and shew how greatly all the Parts of Learning will be advanc'd and improv'd by it: And the first Letter Dr. M—— sent me was this, directed

To the Author of the Athenian Mercury.

SIR,

There have been some Philosophers who have affirm'd all things equally disputable, and that the Difference only lies in the Advantage of well managing the Argument; indeed it appears to me, that there are many Things in most Sciences disputable enough, which if brought to a just and happy Issue, wou'd bid fair for the most considerable Advancement that has been made in Learning these many Years. 'Tis a patronizing of Error, and highly tends towards the settling of it, not to see what has been already said upon Subjects, but to impose crude and indigested Notions upon the World: It also tends to the Propagation of it, to dispute extempore of Things, since the strongest Objections can't be brought on a sudden, nor a just and vigorous Defence made for Truth; and thus weak Defendants and trifling

Opponents leave the Case worse than they found it. Now I think an Attempt which can be free of these Disadvantages, wou'd not be displeasing to you; therefore, Sir, I propose an honourable *Challenge*, as a Pledge of Friendship, upon several disputable Things, which you have advanc'd in all Parts of Learning: And if the Controversy be manag'd with that calm and ingenuous Procedure, which Prudence and our Reputation calls for, it might contribute so far to our own Improvement and Satisfaction, as wou'd infinitely out-ballance the Severity of the Exercise. I promise my self an Answer at your Convenience, and am

Your very humble Servant,

M——

SIR,

I Approve of the Design, and accept your *Challenge*, desiring you in your next to propose your Subjects, and to give me Directions how to send to you, which is all at present from

J. DUNTON.

SIR,

YOU lay further Obligations upon me, which I have yet no Opportunity to repay otherwise than by Acknowledgment, but if you please to chuse your Method, and fix the Laws of Dispute, I shall willingly confine my self to them; and now I think there's no more to do but that I mention a Subject; and the first Subject that shall be debated is— *The Being of a God*.— I thought convenient to give you Notice, that you might have Time before-hand to read upon the Subject. If you please, your Answer to this as before, and for the future we shall have better and more private Opportunities. I am,

SIR, Yours,

M——

SIR,

IN the formal Laws of Dispute I suppose you are not ignorant, only as soft Words and hard Arguments as you please: I desire you to write so the first Time, that there

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there may be no Need of *Replications* and *Rejoinders*; and I shall observe the same Rule, otherwise there will be but little done: However, when you send a *Challenge*, I'll answer it, but shall continue

Your hearty Friend,

J. DUNTON.

SIR,

I Approve the Rules you lay down for our *Weekly Challenges*, so that now here's a *Trial of Skill*, and if you are for *soft Words* and *hard Arguments* (as you say you be) you are as fair a Duellist as I cou'd wish; however, I'm prepar'd to fight you at all Weapons, (I mean ready to argue all *disputable Things*) all I desire is a clear Stage, and from you no Quarter.

The first Subject in Debate is, The Being of a GOD.

SIR,

I Have been thinking over the more popular Arguments that (as 'tis pretended) prove the *Existence of God*, and I must ask your Pardon, if I can't discover the demonstrative Force and Evidence they carry with them; as the *Being of God* wou'd be the first and most important Truth if 'twere disencumber'd and clear'd beyond Doubt and Dispute, so that methinks it lessens a Man's Esteem for the Notion, and unhinges his Mind, when the Support of it labours under Weakness and Defect. I shall give you the Instances and Remarks I gather'd, upon a superficial Survey of the Matter. The first Argument that occurs, is built on that *Congenite Idea*, as some call it, which we have of the Divine Being: From the vast Comprehension of this *Idea*, 'tis infer'd, that God must be the Efficient that first gave it Being. Now cou'd we dislē the Point, I'm perswaded the Consequence wou'd drop in the Operation, to make an Offer at it. If there's none can fully comprehend a Being of infinite Perfection, I don't see that the *Idea* is so big, and carries so much in the Make on't, as is generally suppos'd, that none can fathom an infinite Being in his Thought, is pretty certain; for as the Object is immense and boundless, and the *Idea* suppos'd commensurate, the Mind also must be infinite, that can lodge and contain it. Farther, wou'd you make but a single Experiment of the Case, you'd be satisfy'd. You may put your Mind on the Rack when you please, widen and stretch your Thoughts to the Length of your Power, and when you have done, you might e'en as well have kept your primitive Proportion; for you can't grasp an Inch of Infinity, you'd go nearer to encircle the Earth in your Arms, throw the Alps from their Basis, with the Tilt of your Shoulder. The Argument methinks looks something ridiculous, that because we can't apprehend the Being and Perfection of God, we must needs infer his Existence: You see the Consequence runs from the Imperfection of the Creature to the Divine Existence. I'd fain be inform'd why an Argument of infinite Concern shou'd rather be bottom'd upon this, than any other *Idea*? 'Tis evidently the

most inadequate we can form, seeing the Perfection of an Idea is deriv'd from the Perspicuity and Proportion it bears to its Object; and neither of these can put in the least Pretence in the Case before us; all our other Ideas are more perfect and adequate, because their Objects are limited, not too big for the Mind. A Man might make more of this Point if he argu'd from the Ideas we can form of the References of Things to the *Existence of God*.

A Second Argument, as infirm as the former, is gather'd from the Consent of Nations: To take this in Pieces, wou'd swell a Letter beyond its Bounds; however, to unmask it a little, the Universality of it is a little lame, it thrives ill in *America*, and worse in *Soldania* and *Formosa*. One wou'd conclude, that if the Notion of a God prevail'd in any Quarter of the Universe, 'twou'd influence those uncultivated Parts most apparently; the Natives are unpolish'd, ignorant of Artifice, and the Schemes of Government, and remain just such as the Womb of Providence produc'd 'em; now what cou'd oblige the Perswasion of a Deity in the Minds of these *meer Naturals*? This Thought has given Birth to the Conclusion, that the Notion of a God is a Piece of polittick Subtilty, that was form'd upon Design, and ha only obtain'd with the Nations that have refin'd upon Nature, seeing the very Footsteps of it are not found among Nations cut off from Society and Commerce.

The Third Argument forg'd for the Purpose, and drawn from the Structure and Contrivance of the Universe, lies equally expos'd, if a Man was at leisure to fit it. Don't we see Insects daily traduc'd from the Influence of the Sun, that have as much Mystery and Beauty in their Make as the whole Frame of Things, and yet we know whence they derive their Original, and nothing of a Divinity seems in the least concern'd.

I expect Sir, that you'll oblige the Publick, and your Friend, with your Thoughts of the Matter; I am almost out of Humour with these Arguments, they seem so unreasonable and defenceless. The strongest Barriers are often insufficient to secure the Deity from the Assaults of Atheism; how naked then and expos'd must the Notion lie, entrench'd only with Arguments that are inconclusive, and can't resist a Storm? I know your Penetration will carry you safe thro' the Search, and am impatient till I know the Issue.

Sir, I am Your

Dunton's Answer.

SIR,

To quarrel with the Arguments that prove the Divine Existence, is but one Remove from *Atheism* and *Infidelity*; 'tis an unpromising and bold Enterprise to throw God from his Throne, argue his *Existence* out of Doors, and stifle the Belief of his Being. The firm Perswasion that there's a God, is of infinite Concern to the reasonable Creature; and a Man might as well syllogize against the Hopes of the Humane Race, and tell us in plain Terms, That *Happiness* is impracticable, and beyond our Reach, as at one Stroke to deprive us of the Object of all present and future Expectation. If there ben't a God, the Humane Will may wander o'er the Universe, and never meet with Satisfaction and Rest. The

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Capacities of the Soul can't fill 'emselves with the World, 'tis an Object too unfruitful and narrow; the *Cravings* of the Mind run impatient after something *Invisible*, with which the Creation can't furnish 'em; and shou'd we take a full View of our Desires, 'twou'd be the Enjoyment of a God we search and wish for. To come to the Point: The First Argument you engage, is bottom'd on the Idea which we can't form of a God: 'Tis true, the Force and Evidence on't may not be so clear and convincing as one wou'd wish; but yet we wou'd not lose the least Speck of Light that guides us in the Search after so important a Truth. You're highly offended with the Imperfection of the *Idea*, and methinks you talk there at an untoward rate, seeing 'tis of infinite Moment, and nearly concerns our Happiness, that there's a God so immense and perfect, that his Being is beyond Search and Comprehension. Cou'd I fully fathom the Perfections of God, and force my Understanding quite thro' his *Being*, I shou'd be very indifferent and unconcern'd whether there was a God or no. As to the Truth of the Argument, I wou'd neither build too fast upon it, nor lose its Evidence; that the *Idea* is gather'd from the Ampliation of all known Perfections that are scatter'd among the Creatures, is a common Objection in this Case, tho' it has more of Popularity than Reason. Shou'd we pile up all the Perfections we meet with in the Universe, they'd never climb up to Infinity, that's insurmountable. I'd fain ask a Question upon this Point, 'tis this, Whether these Perfections were pil'd up on purpose to furnish out a Divinity from the whole? Or 'twas only upon Design to parallel the *Idea* of an infinite *Being*, which the Mind was struggling with before; the former Supposition is unreasonable, for the most they cou'd make of their Deity wou'd be no better than a Predicable in Logick, patch'd up of Pieces and Particulars, which the Mind might unpin at Pleasure, and the Frame wou'd dissolve, and every Creature put in for its Share. The Second Supposition must therefore obtain, and I'd know where the Mind cou'd possibly stumble upon this vast *Idea* which she wou'd, but cannot parallel; 'twas beyond the Sphere of her own Activity to form it at first, seeing she had never had any Acquaintance with the Object of this *Idea*, and 'twas impossible her own Perfections cou'd ever magnify, and swell so immoderately as to reach up to the Proportion of this immeasurable Image which she's conscious of, and can't clearly account for: From the Premises, an unprejudic'd Person wou'd easily infer that God has priviledg'd the Mind with Power to form this *Idea*, which shou'd lead her to the Knowledge and Discovery of her Author and End. Enlargement were easy on this Head; but there remains some of your Remarks that require a particular Descant. The Consent of Nations is a farther Argument which you cannot swallow. Your Exceptions agaist the Universality of the Consent are groundless, seeing the more our Acquaintance is cultivated with the Natives of *America*, *Soldania* and *Formosa*, the Notices of a Deity begin to unmask and discover 'emselves. Besides, were your Instances as true as you'd have 'em, they'd make little for your Purpose, seeing wheresoever the Humane Nature is polish'd, Society and Commerce establish'd, there the Notion thrives, and 'tis meer Pretence and Flourish to talk of a Speculative Atheist, his Conscience rebukes him, and his Mind trembles to deny the Divine Existence.

Lastly, You'd throw the Argument off its Hinges,

which is advanc'd upon the Creation and Contrivance of the World. If you'll concern Chance in the Matter I'm sure your Notions of Chance must be Noble, and such as can only be appropriated to the Divine Being, and so the Difference rests on the Propriety of the Name. You argue from the Generation of Insects to *Atheism*, and the Consequence is very extraordinary; this shews you've small Acquaintance with the Common-wealth of Learning. Equivocal Generation is long since argu'd off her Feet, and there's no Support left for the Notion, 'tis Matter of Experiment, that Insects receive their Rise from a congenial Substance, which is only ripen'd and impregnated by the Beams of the Sun.

If this Reply don't relish with ye, you may rally at your Pleasure; I shan't grow weary of the Cause.

Sir, I am your Affectionate Friend,

F. DUNTON.

The Casuistical-Post, or Athenian Mercury.

Quest. How do Astronomers divide the Stars, and whether be they numberless or not?

Answ. As for the fixed Stars we hold them numberless, the Holy Scriptures giving us a Testimony thereof, I mean, that besides the great and infinite Number that we see, there are yet a far more infinite Number of lesser Stars which are by us not seen, as hath been observ'd by certain Prospective Glasses made in *Italy*; and tho' the Ancients have not mark'd out above 1022, their Meaning was not that there were no more Stars, but that they had observ'd none but those, as being only the chiefest which they had need of: And those 1022 Stars are divided into Forty Eight Constellations, or Figures of Animals, which the Ancients have suppos'd for to discern the one from the other, and have separated and dispos'd of 'em into Three Ranks, as *Septentrionals*, *Zodiacs* and *Meridionals*.

Moreover, the Stars are distinguish'd by their several Magnitudes, or Bignesses, which have been found to be Six: So that all the great Stars are of the First Bigness, the lesser of the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Magnitude or Bigness, in which the least of 'em all are comprehended.

Q. Whether or no the Stars be translucent of themselves, and transparent?

A. The Stars have no proper Light of themselves, save in this manner, all the Stars and Planets are of one and the self-same Nature. But the Moon hath no other Light than what she borroweth of the Sun, so no more can any of the other Stars have any other Light but from the Sun.

But suppose it be objected, That the Moon loseth not altogether its Light, tho' she eclipses in the Shadow of the Earth; because that in the eclips'd Party there appears a Redness, and that such a Redness, for ought we know, might be her natural Light.

I answer, That that Redness cannot be her natural Colour, because that if it were so, she wou'd never quit that Redness, save when she increases, or that she is in her First Quarter; and then that part of the Moon which

is not illuminated by the Sun ought to have that Redness, which is not so, as we see by Experience: And therefore all Redness is not natural to the Moon. Moreover, if it be demanded from whence that Redness proceeds; it's from the Reflection of the Light, which is encounter'd by the Moon in the Shadow of the Earth: For as the Moon is a polish'd Body, and as the Shadow of the Earth is never destitute of some little Light, so it's that little Light which causes the Redness in her.

So that by what is aforesaid, it clearly appears, that the Sun is the Principle of Light, it being God's Pleasure to adorn it with such an eminent Quality.

Furthermore, we say that the Stars are not so transparent as the Heaven is, which may be seen by the Moon and *Mercury*, when they are interpos'd between our Eyes and the Sun, and that they eclipse her; and so it's apparent that the Stars are dusky, &c.

Q. Whether are the Heavens round, and do they move the one within the other, from the East to the West, their usual Course?

A. It is easy to prove that the Heavens are round, and that they turn the one within the other, from East to West, the which may appear unto us most manifestly, for we see that the Sun, the Planets, and all the other Stars, do rise first on the East, on our Horizon, then little by little they advance toward the South, and that finally they set in the West, so next again they rise all in the East. ¶ will but instance in the Sun, and say, That it must be either the self same Sun, or another which we daily see to rise and set: It cannot be any other, for that then every Day would require a new one: And if it be the same Sun, it must either have pass'd over, within, or underneath the Earth: Over the Earth it cannot have pass'd, for as much as then there would have been no Night, the Presence of the Sun causing the Day; neither can it have pass'd within the Earth, because, as we shall see hereafter, it's greater than the Earth: It remains then, that it must have pass'd underneath the Earth, and that consequently its Orb or Heaven turns about the Earth: And since all the Heavens turn, the one within the other, about the Earth, and that from the East to the West, we may justly then say that the Heavens are round.

It's also granted that the Heavens are round, because that being they are the most noble part of the World, and in which all the rest are contain'd, it is most necessary that they should be of a round Form, which is the most capable and most perfect of all others. For if the Heavens had any other Figure or Form, those which are inferior to the others could not possibly transport their Planets from the East to the West, because of their Angles, or else we must grant that they penetrate each other, and so there would chance to be a Penetration in the Matter of the Heavens, which would contradict what is easy to prove, that its Matter or Substance is both solid and fix'd.

Q. How were the Heavens open'd when Christ was baptiz'd?

A. First, Some say, *Non reservatione sed oculis fidei*, that they were open'd to the Eyes of Faith, that he might see thereby into Heaven, as Stephen did, *Act 7.* but not truly and really open'd.

Secondly, Others say the contrary, that they were truly open'd: First, Because John and (as is probable) those that were with him saw them open'd. Secondly,

Because this was done for their Sakes that believed not, that they might believe; and therefore it was seen with the Eyes of the Body, not of the Mind.

Thirdly, Others, to whom I rather subscribe and assent, answer, We hear that the Heavens were open'd, and therefore we believe it; but we hear not how they were open'd, and therefore we leave to enquire after it, as not much tending unto Edification.

Q. How it chanceth that the Sea doth neither over-flow, augment, nor enlarge it self?

A. The Cause why the Sea doth not over-flow, augment, nor enlarge it self, tho' so much Water is ingener'd in it, and that it doth continually receive so many Rivers and Fountains into it, is, that the Sea is the natural Receptacle of all the Waters, and their proper retiring and resting Place, and therefore it doth not over-flow, nor enlarge it self; for that no Place can drive back nor hinder the Entrance of that thing which by Nature ought to be in her, since naturally the Place ought to conform it self unto that which it encloseth; like as the Sea, which being capable to receive into her all the Rivers, and nevertheless for their Entrance doth not overflow, nor augment: Also the Sea doth not overflow, because it is of such a vast Extent, that the Rivers are as nothing in Consideration to it. The Third Reason is, Because the Heat of the Sun and the Breath of the Wind consumes such a Quantity of Water, that tho' the Sea continually engenders, and that the Rivers incessantly run into it; yea, God hath ordain'd that it shou'd not lessen nor augment, as it is written in *Job*, *Lord, thou hast set a Limit the which it shall not pass.* The Holy Writ says in *Genesis*, that the Water of the Deluge did rise Fifteen Cubits over the highest Hills under the Heavens, insomuch that all the Earth was cover'd with Water. But tho' this encreasing of Water was so great, yet nevertheless the Sea did not overflow the Earth by transgressing its Limits or Bounds.

The encreasing of those Waters proceeded from Two Causes; the one was, that the Windows of Heaven were open'd, as the Text says, *and it rained on the Earth Forty Days and Forty Nights exceedingly;* the other was, that the Fountains, Rivers and Currents did over-flow, insomuch that the Earth was by them cover'd as aforesaid, *and every living Substance was destroy'd which was upon the Face of the Ground;* except Noah, who only remain'd alive, and they that were with him in the Ark: And afterwards the same Text says, *That God caused a Wind to pass over the Earth which abated the Waters;* the Rain from Heaven was also restrain'd, and the Earth return'd to its first Being.

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